

Fallen Stars

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Summary: After over a year, a new chapter! The rangers take a little time to relax. But just when the party starts, trouble comes again.

1. Part One

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Part One

Zhane aimlessly turned the pages a large, burgundy and gold photo album. Since the Psycho Rangers were destroyed and the rebels were safe out of Dark Spectre's reach, he didn't have anything else to do. He stopped when he came to a page that had just one big picture on it. Featured in it were himself, his parents, Andros, Karone and their parents, and Sidra, his sister.

* * * Flashback * * *

Eight-year old Zhane opened the door to his house. "Mom, I'm home." He called.

"I'm...(gulp) ... in the... [Sniffle]) kitchen." His mother replied.

Zhane came into the kitchen and saw his mother sitting at the table, sobbing uncontrollably. In her hand was a folded piece of paper.

"Mother, what's wrong?" he asked.

She handed him the paper.

It read:

Dear Mother, Daddy, and Zhane,

I'm sorry, but I'm leaving and I'm never coming back. The guilt is just too much for me. I'm going to a place where I can do less harm to you and everyone. This is all for the best. Despite everything, I love you all very, very much.

- Sidra

* * * * *

"Hey, Zhane," Andros walked in and sat down next to him. "Listen, I want to apologize for the way I've been acting lately."

"How have you been acting?" Zhane asked.

"You know, all moody and depressed."

"You're always like that." He pointed out.

Andros gave him a Look. "Well, more than usual."

"Are you going to apologize to everyone, or just me?"

"You're the first." Andros told him. "Ashley's next."

"Is she the reason you're doing this?"

Andros nodded. "Partly. I think she's starting to get sick of me. I'm getting sick of me. One, day, I'll get my sister back. I'm sure-" Andros paused, finally noticing the photo album. "Sorry."

"Don't be. I should be the one who's sorry." Zhane said.

"Don't you think you should forgive her?" Andros said gently. "It wasn't her fault."

"You should be as mad as I am." Zhane said angrily. "Karone would be here, safe and sound, if it weren't for her."

"But, Zhane..."

"It's not just that. Maybe I would forgive her if it was, but it isn't. She didn't think we cared about her, despite her mistake. And she didn't care enough to come back when K-O-35 was attacked." Zhane got up and stormed out of the room, leaving Andros staring after him.

* * * * *

Ecliptor entered the Main Control Room of the Dark Fortress, pushing a few Quantrons out of his way as he went. "Where's Astronema?" He demanded.

Elgar scratched his head. "Uh, she's in her room."

Ecliptor pushed some buttons and opened the gate that was her door.

"Astronema, Dark Spectre wants to speak with you."

She spun around in her chair. "What does he want?" She asked angrily. But she followed him to the viewing screen.

"Astronema. You must destroy the Rangers before I complete the power drain."

"I have a plan." She snapped her fingers. Elgar hurried in, almost dropping a glass beaker, which he presented to Astronema. "I have created a formula to make my Quantrons unbeatable. No one will stop you, not even the Power Rangers." She smiled an evil smile.

"They'd better not." Dark Spectre said. Then the screen went black.

Astronema turned to Ecliptor. "Attack Earth!"

* * * * *

"Earth is under attack." D.E.C.A. announced.

"Where's Zhane?" Andros asked.

"He's in the engine ro-" D.E.C.A. began, but he was gone before she could finish.

"Zhane, come on. Stop feeling sorry for yourself. We have to go." Andros grabbed his arm and pulled him out the door.

"What's going on?" Zhane asked.

"I don't know, we'll find out when we get there."

They morphed and teleported to Angel Grove. The four other Rangers were already there fighting when the Red and Silver Rangers arrived.

Ashley cheered. "You guys are right on time."

"Yeah," Cassie agreed. "We could use your help."

Zhane bowed. "We live to serve."

"Hey, Zhane. Pay attention." Andros kicked at a Quantron who had been sneaking up on his best friend. It grabbed his foot and flipped him over.

"Wow," T. J. said a few minutes later. "I've never seen Quantrons fight so well."

"Yeah," Carlos agreed. "We can't hold them off much longer."

Ashley hit a Quantron with her elbow. While it usually worked, this time it didn't even phase him.

Cassie was pinned against a tree. Zhane tried to help her, but another Quantron grabbed him from behind. Soon, the others were caught, too.

Lightening flashed, and Astronema appeared. She gave an evil laugh. "You Rangers seem to be in quite a bit of trouble. Destroy them!"

"Karone, please don't do this." Andros begged.

Ecliptor drew his sword. "Red Ranger, you're going to be the first to go." He raised it above his head.

"Andros!" Ashley screamed.

Suddenly, they saw a flash of white and another Ranger took hold of Ecliptor's sword. "Solar sword." Her own sword appeared in her hand, and with a beam of light, broke Ecliptor's sword in two. Another beam of light freed the Rangers, and practically disintegrated the Quantrons. Astronema and Ecliptor disappeared on their own.

Andros slowly approached the White Ranger. "Who are you?"

"All will be explained in time. Right now we'd better get back to the ship."

"How do you know about it?" asked Cassie.

She didn't reply. "Solarboard, surf's up!" A surfboard type galaxy glider came to her. She hopped on and lifted off.

The others called their galaxy gliders and followed her to the Astro Megaship, onto the Bridge.

"Another Ranger?" Alpha said, surprised.

The Rangers took off their helmets, waiting for the White Ranger to do the same. She did, and revealed a girl with green eyes, and silver streaks in her long, blonde braid.

Zhane gasped when he saw her. She was older, but her face was unmistakable. "Get out." He said, his voice wavering a little.

"Zhane," Andros began.

The girl shook her head. "It's all right. I'll give him a little time to cool down." She turned to leave.

"Wait!" Ashley called after her. But she was too late. "Who was that Ranger? And why did you tell her to leave?"

"She's my sister."

To be continued...

2. Part Two

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Part Two

"Your sister?" What is it, a crime on your planet to say you have one?" Ashley said.

"No, we just don't like to talk about them because it hurts too much." Andros replied. "I guess we'd better explain."

Zhane shook his head. "You explain. I don't want to have anything to do with her."

Andros sighed. "Fine, have it your way. Sit down, guys. This is going to take awhile." They hurried to find seats and leaned closer to hear his story.

"Okay, I'm sure you've always wondered why we were alone when Karone was kidnapped. You just didn't say anything about it, which I'm grateful for. But the truth is, we weren't alone. At least, we weren't supposed to be. Sidra, Zhane's sister, is about 6 years older than we are and used to be our baby-sitter. The day Karone was kidnapped, she was supposed to take the three of us to the park. But Zhane got sick, so we went with her alone. Sidra left us by ourselves for a minute to get something. I don't remember what. I guess you know what happened after that. When she came back later on, I wasn't the only one there. Her parents were steaming, as well as mine. So was Zhane. Sidra never felt that they forgave her. A few years later she ran away. We never heard from her, until now."

"Wow," Cassie breathed. "I wonder what made her decide to show up after all this time."

"That's easy," T.J. said. "For the same reason any Ranger would: Other Rangers are in trouble."

"He has a point." Ashley said. "What I want to know is, how did she get her powers?"

Andros shrugged. "Zordon or someone. But he never told us about it. I guess he figured she needed time before she was ready to face her family again." He glanced over at Zhane. "And before they were ready to forgive her."

Zhane scowled. "Okay, okay. I get it. Fine, she can come back. I give up."

"D.E.C.A. open..." Andros began.

"Already done. She's on hold." Sidra's face appeared on the screen.

"I must say, you didn't take as long as I expected."

Andros chuckled. "All it takes is a little guilt."

"Be right there." A few seconds later she teleported onto the bridge. She was now wearing a flight suit similar to theirs, but black like her brother's.

"Hi," she said shyly. "How are things? Are you still searching?" She asked Andros.

Andros shook his head. "No need."

"You found her?"

"Yes, well, Astronema..."

"What about her?"

"She is Karone. When I had found out, she came over to our side, but they brainwashed her."

"I'm sorry." She turned to Zhane. "So, don't you have a hug for your sister?" She teased.

"Um, not quite yet."

"Okay, whenever you're ready." She said sadly.

Zhane grinned. "I'm kidding. Come here." She wrapped her arms around him.

"I'm so proud of you." She said, sniffing. "You don't know how much I've missed you." She wiped her eyes with his sleeve.

"It's okay." Zhane said soothingly. "We're together now."

Sidra stopped crying. "Well, what are you waiting for? Introduce me to your friends."

"Oh, right. That's Cassie." He pointed to the pink ranger.

"Hi." She said warmly.

"They're Carlos and T.J."

"Hey," they said together.

"And that's Ashley, Andros' girlfriend."

"Andros has a girlfriend?" She raised her eyebrow.

"What? Why can't I?"

"I remember, the last time I saw you, you said girls were a waste of time. What about you, Zhane?"

"Me? I'm in love with Karone."

"Well, I know that. You have been since she was born."

"I'm serious." Zhane said.

"Did you guys switch personalities or something?"

"Why do you ask?" said Andros.

"Because you, I mean, he, I mean, well just because. It's just how

things were supposed to be. Zhane would have like, fifty girlfriends or something, and Andros would be either in love or single."

"It's not like I haven't." Zhane pointed out.

"And I've been single for a long time. Whether I'm in love or not I'm not going to say. Not right now."

"Why can't you say it in front of me? Does it mean you don't and just want to spare my feelings?"

"I wouldn't have a problem saying it in front of you. It's everyone else."

"We don't mind." T.J. piped up. Andros gave him a Look.

"Anyway, things have changed, for the better."

"I'm not saying they haven't. I just wish I could go back in time so I could see what happened to you to."

"You wouldn't have to if you had just been there." Zhane said.

"I know. But you can't change the past."

"I think your second mistake was worse than the first."

"I'm only human. What's done is done. And anyway, I plan to fix my first one."

"And how are you going to do that?"

"When I was living on Eltar, a couple years ago, I met this scientist. He was, I suppose a bit mad, but what scientist isn't? Anyway, he studies mind-altering and stuff like that. He might be able to help Karone."

"It might be dangerous." Andros considered the idea. "Where is this guy?"

"He's been hiding. But I know where he is."

"And where would that be?" Zhane asked impatiently.

"Planet Scogliera in the Oblairion Galaxy."

"D.E.C.A., set a course." Andros instructed.

"Course set to Scogliera." D.E.C.A. replied.

"Let's just hope he can help. It might be our only chance."

* * * * *

The seven Rangers carefully climbed the outside wall of a cave. A mound of rocks and boulders sealed its entrance.

"The only way in is from up here." Sidra informed them once they had reached the top. She removed a long, flat stone to reveal a hole in the ceiling of the cave. "Professor Barlow isn't taking any chances."

She carefully went down a ladder. The others followed.

The cave was pitch black. There was just a tiny glimmer of light coming from far away.

"This way." They followed her down a tunnel. With each step the light grew brighter, until finally they reached a small room. They saw test tubes with a bubbling liquid inside, what looked like a x-ray machine and some strange tools. Pouring something into a test tube was a thin man with thick gray hair going every which way and wearing a long white coat and goggles. He certainly looked mad.

Sidra slowly approached him. "Professor Barlow?"

The man gave a little jump and screamed. He turned around. When he saw them, he relaxed.

"Ah, Sidra. What brings you here?"

"My friends and I need your help. "

* * * * *

"My, oh, my." Professor Barlow said. "That is quite a predicament you've gotten yourselves in, indeed."

"Can you fix it?" Ashley asked.

"Well, I just might be able to. I've developed a new process, I won't give you all the details, very hush-hush mind you... I can't imagine what would happen if it fell into the wrong hands, but I think it might work."

"Great. Let's go." Andros got up to leave.

"Now wait just a minute. There's absolutely no way I'm going there. I'll help you, but I won't go there. You must get her and bring her to your ship. That's as far as I'm going to go. No way am I going to let them catch me."

"You'll be just fine." Sidra reassured him. "Zhane and I will go get Karone. The rest of you go wait for us on the Megaship."

"I'll come with you."

"No, Andros. You'd better go straight home. Don't worry. We'll take care of everything."

"Right." Zhane added confidently. "We'll bring Karone home, once and for all."

* * * * *

"Ouch!" Zhane exclaimed. He had stubbed his toe trying to sneak through a doorway.

"Shut up!" Sidra hissed. "You'll get us caught."

"Sorry." Zhane whispered back. But she wasn't listening. "What is it?"

"Quick, hide!" She pulled him behind some boxes, which could possibly have held spare Quantron parts. Elgar and two Quantrons passed by.

Zhane snorted. "You're afraid of them?"

"I didn't know who it was. Now be quiet."

"Okay, okay. I'll be quiet. But I won't like it."

"Well, if you don't be quiet, we'll never get this done or get out a live."

"Message received. Can I just say one, no, two more things?"

Sidra sighed. "What?"

"Karone should be done that hall, and you really need to loosen up."

"Well, that's not going to happen if we get caught. Our goal is to capture. Not to be captured."

Zhane was silent the rest of the way.

"Okay," she whispered. "You distract those Quantrons and I'll get Karone."

"Hardly a challenge. Be careful, she's a lot stronger than she looks."

"I think I can handle her. I used to be her baby-sitter remember? I've seen every tantrum, every move she has or would have. So unless she's learned a lot of new ones, no need to worry about me."

"Good luck. I'm glad it isn't me."

"Loosen up! I've got a few tricks up my sleeve."

Zhane chuckled as he knocked out a Quantron. She sounded just like him.

* * * * *

A few moments later, Sidra dragged along an unconscious Astronema back to her brother.

"Nice job." Zhane complimented her. "Now let's get out of her before Ecliptor shows up."

"Lead the way." Sidra replied cheerfully. She followed him to the Dark Fortress' docking bay and they hitched a ride on a Volocifighter like he and Andros did the last time they went.

They came back to find the others close to panic, even though they had only been gone for a short time. Barlow looked panicky too; he had never done his procedure before, as it was still experimental. He was also frightened of his patient, despite the fact that she was unconscious and there would be no chance of her waking up during

surgery.

"Well," he said nervously. They were taking her to the medical bay where it would be done. "I shall only need the robot, go on, out, all of you." He waved his hands at them to shoo them out. They didn't hesitate to leave. Naturally, none of them had any desire to see a person's brain, even though they weren't sure it would occur. As they left, they heard Barlow mutter: "I really need a lawyer, not to mention a body guard. They're good but if I screw up, who knows what they might do to me."

"Are you sure this is a good idea?" Carlos said once the door was closed.

Sidra tried to hide it, but they could tell she was doubtful.

"Barlow is brilliant. If any one can do it, he can."

Then the universe must be full of real idiots then. I'm not sure what your definition is, but in my dictionary, his picture would not be next to that word. Insane, maybe. Mad, I could see that. Doesn't know what he's doing, definitely."

"Shut up Zhane." Andros said giving him a Look. "Not everyone has a picture dictionary like you do. And you're not helping."

"That seems to be a popular phrase today." Zhane commented, glancing at his sister.

"With good reason. Let's just remain calm."

The others looked at her like she was crazy.

To be continued...

3. Part Three

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Part Three

Andros paced nervously. "What's taking so long?"

"Be patient, Andros." Sidra said.

"I'm sure Karone is just fine." Ashley added.

"What kind of credentials does this guy have, anyway?" Zhane thought aloud. "Who was the idiot that gave him his Ph.D.?"

"Shut up Zhane!" The girls said together.

"Why is everybody picking on me?"

"Because you're acting like a jerk." Sidra replied. "Is he always like this? If he is, maybe I should reconsider staying here."

"Leave him alone." Andros said. "He's just as nervous as we are, perhaps even more so, and this is his way of showing it."

"An interesting theory." Cassie said seriously. "Have you ever considered therapy?"

"As a career, or being in it?" Cassie giggled.

Ashley groaned. "Do you think he knows anything about pain killers? You people are giving me a headache."

"Maybe he could split your head open." Zhane said sarcastically. "It's probably the only thing he knows how to do." This time they refrained from telling him to shut up.

"How long has it been?" Andros asked impatiently.

Ashley looked at her watch. "It's been..."

The door opened and Barlow stepped out.

"Is she okay?" Andros said urgently.

"We won't know until she wakes up. Just as a precaution, perhaps we could restrain her..."

Zhane jumped out of his seat. "More and more, I'm starting to believe that I'm right and you are a quack."

"Zhane!" Sidra pushed him back into the chair. "I'm so sorry. My brother desperately needs mental help."

"Quite all right, Sidra, my dear. I can understand how he's feeling."

"What do you know about how I'm feeling?"

"I felt the same way when my wife had surgery many years ago. Of course, she died, so that could be the reason. But in any case, I can sympathize."

"Did you have to say that?" Andros said. "I was worried enough, and it hadn't even occurred to me."

"It did to me. I don't know what I'm going to do if anything happens to Karone. I never got a chance to tell her how I felt about her."

"Well, there's no time like the present. I think she's awake." They followed Ashley inside.

Karone sat up. "My head hurts. What happened to me? How'd I get here?"

"We brought you." Sidra said. "You probably don't remember me. I'm Sidra, Zhane's sister. I used to be your baby-sitter."

"Oh, how interesting. But start at the beginning. Last thing I remember was Ecliptor..."

Zhane patted her hand. "They brainwashed both of you. But Sidra knew this guy and he was able to fix you." He pointed at Barlow, who was looking thrilled that it actually worked.

"How long have I been like that?"

"A couple of weeks." Andros replied.

Karone turned to Professor Barlow. "Is there anything you can do to help Ecliptor?"

He shook his head. "No, it was only for humans. Not for whatever he is."

"He's Ecliptor. Not any particular species, just Ecliptor. There is no other."

"Yes, well, I can't help him. I'm sorry."

"Karone seems to me like someone who has a fondness for creatures like that." Sidra commented.

"Of course. Why'd you think she likes Zhane?" Karone glared at her brother.

"Hey!" Zhane began. Then he sighed. "Oh, well, at least you said she likes me."

Karone turned bright red. "When did you get back?"

"Right after you left."

"You always have had the worst timing."

"Guys, do you think you could move this lover's quarrel somewhere else?" Ashley giggled. "I love that expression."

"Lovers? Ha! I'm going to go change."

"You do that. And maybe when you do you'll suddenly become nice to me." Karone ignored him.

"By the way, I love you." Zhane called after her.

"Yeah, whatever." She replied.

"Well, I should be going now."

"Of course. I'll take you. I'll see you later guys." Sidra and the professor left as well.

"Bye." Ashley said distractedly. "Maybe you can give them couples therapy."

"Who? Sidra and Barlow?" Andros said confused.

"No, Zhane and Karone."

Zhane snorted. "She's the one that needs therapy. No matter how hard I try to be nice, she's always mean to me."

"Give her a break. You're cranky when you first wake up, too." T.J. pointed out. "She needs time to adjust."

Zhane sighed. "Maybe you're right."

"Of course he is. He didn't you to be our leader for nothing." Ashley said brightly.

"Are you implying that people think I'm stupid." T.J. said, hurt.

"You're too sensitive."

Karone came back into the room. Andros looked over at Zhane. He looked like he had just won a million dollars.

"She's not that pretty, Zhane. No offense."

"That was pretty offensive to me."

"And to me. You should know I'm better than that."

Andros raised an eyebrow. "Are you?"

"Yes. I'm not happy because of her, I'm happy cause of her."

"That makes no sense." Cassie commented.

"The movies." Zhane replied. They looked at him blankly.

"We ran into each other at the movies that time. Literally." Karone explained. "I was looking like this."

"I thought it was you. And I was right."

"Why were you there in the first place? Is that when you had the date?"

"Andros!" Ashley elbowed him. "Don't be so nosy."

"I'm her brother. It's my job."

"It's okay. It was before that. Afterwards I asked him out. But he was late."

"Because of the monster. You guys remember. Horribull was blocking your weapons."

"He is right." Carlos said.

"Oh. I guess I owe you an apology then. I'm sorry."

"I'll forgive you. If you go out with me again. And this time, don't blast me again. Those flowers turned out to be a real waste of money."

"Only if you're on time." She looked at Andros hopefully.

"Fine. Do what you want. But leave me out of it. And if I see..., well, I don't want to think about it."

"It could be worse," said Ashley.

"Don't go there."

"We won't. Trust me."

"Trust us, you mean."

Karone nodded. "Right. Trust us."

"It's getting late." Alpha said. "You need your sleep."

"Good night Alpha." They chorused and they went to sleep.

* * * * *

"Zhane, wake up."

Zhane opened his eyes. "Karone, what are you doing here?"

"I couldn't sleep." She replied.

"What does that have to do with me? Just because you can't sleep, doesn't mean I can't either."

"You'll have all day to sleep."

"Why didn't you go to Andros?"

"I didn't want to wake him up."

"But you can wake me up?"

Karone gave him a look. "We're going somewhere tomorrow. Besides, I trust you more."

Zhane sighed. "I'm going to regret this. Okay, you can stay. But only for a half-hour. No more. Then you're going back to your own room."

Karone nodded. "All right."

"So what's the matter?"

Karone sat down next to him. "First of all, I'm worried about Ecliptor. What if Darkonda or someone tries to hurt him?"

"I'm sure he'll be fine. He's under Dark Spectre's control now, so they can't hold anything against him."

"I wish there was something we could do to help him."

"Don't worry. We'll find a way." Zhane said confidently. "I promise."

"Thanks." Karone hugged him.

"You think you can go to sleep now?"

She shook her head. "No, that was only one of the things that was bothering me."

"What else?"

"Two things. I'm worried I might become Astronema again."

"You won't. That guy knew what he was doing. I admit, I didn't think so at first, but he proved me wrong."

"I hope so. And the last thing is, do you think everyone will forgive me for the things I've done?"

"Of course. Most of us already do. The people on Earth don't even know about them. And once the rebels find out you're Karone, they'll get over it."

"Okay. Thank you." Karone kissed him on the cheek and went back to her room. D.E.C.A. shut the lights and he went back to sleep.

* * * * *

"Zhane, wake up." He was awakened the second time that night, this time by his sister.

Zhane glared at her. "What do you want?"

"I just came to check on you?"

"Couldn't you do that while I was asleep."

"Yes, but I wanted to find out how Karone is doing."

"She's fine. She woke me up a few hours ago. Didn't you two ever hear the expression, 'Let sleeping Zhanes lie'?"

"No, we haven't. We enjoying irritating you anyway."

"Too bad. Now if you don't mind, I need my rest." He rolled over. Sidra poked him.

"Leave me alone."

"Come on. We haven't seen each other in years. We have a lot of catching up to do. Isn't that more important then sleep?"

"Obviously it is to you. But the only things I want to catch are Zs. D.E.C.A., what time is it?"

"It is 5 A.M. in Angel Grove."

"Five? The Sun's not even awake yet!" Zhane exclaimed.

"We live in space. We don't have a sun." Sidra reminded him.

"Whatever. Just leave. Please. I'm begging you."

"Fine, go back to sleep. I had something important to talk to you about, but I guess it will have to wait."

"Good. Now go!" Zhane covered his head with his pillow.

Sidra smiled at him and quietly tiptoed out of the room.

* * * * *

The next morning, Zhane went to breakfast to find that all of his friends were waiting for him.

"Finally. I thought you'd never wake up." Sidra said.

Zhane got a bagel out of the Synthetron. It was one of the many 'Earth foods', as Andros called them, that he had come to like. "Where's Karone?" He asked as he took a large bite.

"She's still asleep. I was worried she'd get here before you."

"Why? What's up?"

"That's what we'd like to know." Andros replied. "But she wouldn't say it unless we were all here. Now you can tell us."

"All right. When our powers were created, there was supposed to be an eighth ranger. The Purple Ranger. I think Karone could be that Ranger. If she deserves it."

"What do you mean?" Carlos asked puzzled.

"It has immense power and would be extremely dangerous if it fell into the wrong hands. Zordon made it so that only one person could have that power. Someone he believed was worthy. He thought we deserved our powers, but anyone could have them if they had the morpher. But for this, only one person can use it. Otherwise it won't work. I think Karone is that person. Zordon was considering the four of us as rangers when we were kids. It makes sense. The only thing is, would she want it?"

"Why wouldn't she?" asked T.J.

"Because, she's scared she'll become Astronema again." Zhane replied.

"How do you know?" Andros asked.

"She told me. She might be scared to try."

"You're right." They saw Karone standing in the doorway. "And even if I do try, I probably don't deserve it, after all the things I've done."

"But that wasn't your fault. They brainwashed you." Cassie said.

"Not the whole time. Before I was acting on my own."

"Not completely. I believe Dark Spectre did something to you that made you evil. He gave you all those bitter feelings. It just wore off after a while. Don't worry. If anything is going to happen, you won't be able to use the powers."

Karone considered it for a moment. "All right. I'll try. It can't hurt."

"So where's the morpher?" Zhane asked.

"I have it right here." Sidra pulled it out of her pocket and handed it to Karone. "It works the same as the others."

Karone looked at it, unsure of what to do.

"You remember Karone. From when you were Ashley."

She nodded slightly and closed her eyes. "Let's rocket." She said, in barely a whisper. She started to open it. Andros stopped her.

"No, no, no." He shook his head. "Say it like you mean it."

"Yeah," Ashley added. "Get into the spirit. Really shout it out."

"Okay. Let's rocket!" She opened the morpher and began pressing the buttons; 3, 3, 5. She closed her eyes as she pressed the last button. Almost immediately, she felt a strange sensation come over her. She opened her eyes. "Did it work?"

Andros grinned proudly. "Yup. You did it!"

Karone took off her helmet. "I don't believe it. I actually did it." Andros gave her a big hug.

"I'm the Purple Ranger. This is so, so... what's the word?"

"Cool." Ashley supplied.

"Right. This so cool. Andros, could you let go? You're suffocating me."

"Oh, sorry." He released her.

"One thing, though. How do I get this off?"

The others laughed. "Say, power down." T.J. instructed.

"Pow-"

"Hold that thought." D.E.C.A. interrupted. "I detect a disturbance on Earth."

"Come on." The Rangers headed for the jump tubes. Karone put her helmet back on and followed Andros.

They arrived on Earth a few minutes later.

"This is so cool!" Karone started to say. But her spirits sank when

she saw who was waiting for them.

It was Ecliptor.

To be continued.

4. Part Four

> <meta name="Generator"> Disclaimer: Power Rangers belongs to Saban

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Fallen Stars

Part Four

Karone froze. Out of all the monsters in the universe, she had never expected that her first battle as a Ranger would be against him. And he was the one she wanted to fight the least.

"Are you okay?" Zhane asked her.

What's a matter, Ranger? A little nervous the first day on the job?" Ecliptor asked snidely.

"Ecliptor, it's me. Karone. Astronema.

"Astronema? Nice try, but I'm not going to fall for that."

"Power down."

"Karone, are you sure this is a good idea?" Sidra asked.

She walked towards him slowly. "Don't you recognize me?" She said, tearfully.

"Astronema would never be a Power Ranger."

"What have they done to you? Even like this, you should still know me. You raised me, remember? You were always like a father to me."

"It's those things they implanted in the two of you. He's not in control anymore." Zhane said.

Karone morphed again. "We've got to do something to help him."

Zhane thought for a second. "I have an idea. Super Silverizer!

"Don't hurt him!"

"I won't. I'm going to try to destroy those things. If I get them on the outside, the inside ones shouldn't be able to function. I hope."

"It's worth a try," said Andros. "We'll help you out. Spiral Saber;

booster mode!"

"Quadro-blaster." Carlos said.

"Solar sword!"

"Please be careful."

"Don't worry. We know what we're doing." Ashley said comfortingly.

"Fire!" Andros commanded. They all shot at the metallic parts on Ecliptor's head.

"I think it's working," TJ said.

"Keep at it, guys." Andros instructed.

There was a slight explosion. Ecliptor fell to the ground.

"Ecliptor!" Karone rushed over to him.

"Did it work?" asked Cassie. The others shrugged.

"Ecliptor, can you hear me? Are you okay."

He moaned and looked up. Seeing he was surrounded by Power Rangers, he backed up and disappeared.

"No!" Karone cried. "It didn't work!"

"I don't know," said Sidra. "I think he's just a little overwhelmed by 8 Power Rangers."

"Let's go." Zhane said. But then someone grabbed him from behind.

"Right, Zhane." Andros agreed. "Zhane? Where'd he go?"

A hologram of Darkonda appeared in front of them.

"Your friend is with me. But you'll only get him back if Astronema surrenders."

"No!" Andros said. "We're never letting her go back under Dark Spectre's control."

"Don't make promises you can't keep, Red Ranger. You have eight hours to decide who is more important." The hologram ended.

"What are we going to do now?" asked Sidra.

"Isn't it obvious? I have to surrender."

"Karone, you can't!" Andros exclaimed.

"I'm sure there's a way to get Zhane back." Ashley said. "But, if you surrender, we'll lose both of you. I don't trust Darkonda."

"Neither do I." Andros agreed. "There must be another alternative."

"Well, we're not going to find one standing around here." Carlos said. "Let's go back to the ship."

They called for their galaxy gliders and left Earth. They didn't notice that someone was watching them.

* * * * *

Andros slammed his fists on the table. "I'm really getting sick of Darkonda. First Karone, now Zhane, who next?"

"I wish we could get into the Dark Fortress somehow." TJ said. "But they're probably expecting us."

"Well, there's only one choice then. I have to go back."

"No, you don't."

Andros spun around. "Who said that? Who's there?"

"It's me." Ecliptor appeared.

"Ecliptor! You're okay!" Karone threw her arms around him.

"Yes, I am all right, my princess."

"You recognize me?"

"Of course I do," he replied, surprised. "I know every cubic centimeter. Why would you think otherwise?"

Karone started to cry. But this time they were tears of happiness.

"Now, about your boyfriend."

"What can we do?"

"Astronema... I mean, Karone, you simply can't go back there. I'll do it."

"What? I can't let you..."

"Don't worry about me. They don't know that I'm not under Dark Spectre's control. So I can get in there without anyone giving it a second thought."

"But..."

"I'll be fine. And even if there was a chance I wouldn't. Keeping you safe here is my first priority."

"Thank you."

"Now dry your eyes. I have work to do."

Andros nodded. "Good luck... And thank you for taking care of my

sister."

Ecliptor bowed his head and left.

"Do you think he'll be all right?"

Andros put his arm around her. "I hope so, Karone. I hope so."

* * * * *

Darkonda paced around the dungeon with a smile on his face.

"I'll destroy Astronema one and for all. And you, Silver Ranger, are going to help me do it."

"No way. I'll never hurt Karone. Never." Zhane declared.

"Oh, but you see, just by being here you're hurting her. Soon your precious Karone will be no more." Darkonda chuckled. "First Astronema, then soon Dark Spectre himself."

"I'm not going to let you get away with this."

"Oh, but I already have." Darkonda left him, laughing.

Zhane punched the bars of his cell. "Ow. How am I supposed to get out of here."

"Leave that to me, Ranger."

"Who said that? Who's there?"

"Best friends do sound alike." Ecliptor stepped out of the shadows.

"What are you doing here?"

"Rescuing you, of course."

"Thanks, but I don't need you to rescue me." Zhane said.

"I know you don't like me. And I don't blame you. But we have something in common."

"And what is that?"

"You and I both care deeply about Karone. And that's a connection neither of us are willing to break. Like Andros and I, we are being pushed together by concern for her well-being."

"You're concerned about her? You're a monster."

"So many times I have been called that name," Ecliptor said sadly. "And I still hate it every time I hear it."

"Why are you offended by it? It's who you are."

"Yes, it's who I am. But it is not who I was."

"You mean you weren't always like this?"

Ecliptor nodded. "No. Many years ago, I was a human just like you. Life was happy. I had a wife, a daughter. I worked for peace, on the side of good. Darkonda was one of my greatest enemies back then, as he still is today. One day, I got a note from him, telling me to meet him at a secluded place in the forest of my home planet. I was wary of a trap, but I went anyway. I feared that, if I did not, he would come to me and hurt my family. I left them and went to meet Darkonda. When I got to our meeting place, he wasn't there. From behind, he hit me with a ray from some sort of machine. It turned me into a monster. I went home to my family, but my wife turned me away at the door. I tried to explain, but everything about me was different. She didn't know me. I still remember the words she said to me that day: "Get away from us, you horrible monster.""

"But, how did you start working for Dark Spectre?"

"With my new body, I had nowhere else to turn to. I had to pretend to be one of them. And then Karone came.

"Darkonda brought her to me. Dark Spectre had ordered her to be taken so she could succeed him. I was the only one who knew about children. All along, I've served Astronema, not him. Unfortunately, she fell into the depths of the darkness of evil, and I followed. But she still made me remember what I had once been, and my family. She was all I had now. I could not abandon her, like I was forced to do to my own daughter."

"Wow. I'm sorry. I didn't know."

"No one knows but Darkonda and I. Not even Dark Spectre himself. Now we must hurry and get you out of here. Darkonda has ordered that Karone must surrender to him in eight hours, if she wishes to save you. I couldn't let her do that."

"Karone actually was going to?"

"Of course. I've known her since she was a child. I know she loves you. I can tell."

Zhane grinned. "What are we waiting for? Let's go!"

Ecliptor quieted him. "There may be others around." He unlocked the cell door. "We must be quick."

They started to run down the hall when Zhane came to an abrupt halt.

"What is it?"

"My digimorpher. I don't have it."

"Where is it? I'll go get it."

"It's on the other side of the dungeon. Be careful."

"I will. They won't even know I was there."

Zhane raced up steep steps to the Dark Fortress' control room. He sneaked all the way to the docking bay.

"I've been doing this a lot lately." He said to himself. He climbed on the back of a Volocifighter. It lifted off and left the Dark Fortress. Zhane kept his eyes peeled and then he saw it. The Astro Megaship! He was home.

The others spotted him on the viewing screen on the bridge.

"Zhane!" Karone exclaimed. She hurried out.

"You can borrow my Galaxy Glider." Andros called after her.

"Thanks, I was going to anyway."

She sped towards them and shot down the Volocifighter. She grabbed Zhane's hand as he started to fall.

"Thanks." He smiled at her.

"No problem." They went back into the Megaship where the others were waiting to meet them.

Karone demorphed. "Where's Ecliptor?"

"He went back to get my digimorpher." Zhane said. "He should have been back by now."

Karone put her faces in her hands. "Oh no!"

"Do not worry, my princess. I said I would be all right."

Karone ran to him. "Ecliptor! Don't you ever do that to me again."

"Same demanding little girl at heart. That will never change."

The others laughed at her. Ecliptor slumped against the wall.

"What's wrong? Are you hurt?" Karone asked anxiously.

"No, I am just weak. I'm going to go rest."

"Right. D.E.C.A., show him to his room."

"Affirmative." The computer replied.

"You won't believe what Ecliptor told me." Zhane said when he was out of earshot.

"What?" asked Ashley, curiously.

"He said he was human once. And that's not all. He had a wife and a daughter!"

"You're kidding." Karone said. "He never told me that."

"I know. He never told anyone. Only Darkonda knows because he's the one who did it to him."

Sidra looked thoughtful. "Hmm. If he was once human, he could be again. I'm going to go see Professor Barlow."

"Not him again!" Zhane groaned. "What for?"

"He might know someone who can change Ecliptor back."

"You think so?" said Carlos.

Sidra shrugged. "It's worth a try."

To be continued...

5. Part Five

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Fallen Stars

Part Five

"Professor Barlow?"

The scientist dropped the beaker he was holding. It smashed it to pieces and made a puddle of white liquid.

"Sidra, please. Give me notice before you come bursting in here."

"Sorry," she said. "I hope it wasn't too important."

He shrugged off her apology. "That's all right. I can always get more. It wasn't homogenized anyway." She looked at him quizzically. He held up a cookie. "Can't have them without milk," he explained. "Sit down. Would you like one? Chocolate, chocolate chip."

"Sure, thanks." She sat down, and he handed her a cookie and a glass of milk.

"So, what bring you here this time?"

"It's about Ecliptor."

He nearly choked. "Like I already explained, there's nothing I can..."

She interrupted him. "That's taken care of. But the thing is, he was human once. I was hoping maybe you'd know someone who could change him back."

He thought for a moment. "Well, I have this cousin..."

* * * * *

Sidra returned a few hours later. The other rangers were sitting in

the work bay, eating the Chinese food they had gotten from Earth. Everyone was scarfing it down except Andros and Ashley. She was too busy teaching him how to eat with chopsticks.

"Hey," Karone greeted her. "You're just in time for dinner. I managed to keep some of the food safe from your brother."

"I can't help it. This stuff is really good."

"Don't talk with your mouth full," Sidra scolded him. She took the carton Karone handed her. "You eat like a pig."

"Beg your pardon?"

"Hey, that's an Earth expression!" said Cassie.

Sidra nodded. "My friend's gone to Earth a lot so he taught me a few things."

"That's good. Maybe now you can translate for the boys. I'm sick of explaining things to them," Ashley said. "Mostly Andros. Zhane fits right in."

"He always was the outgoing one," said Sidra.

"I resent that," said Andros. "If you recall, I happened to make four friends all by myself."

"Only because we forced you," said TJ, swallowing a big chunk of rice.

"You weren't exactly friendly," Carlos added.

"Anyway," said Karone, "what did Barlow say?"

"Does he know anyone?" Ecliptor asked urgently.

She nodded. "Yes, his cousin Dr. Herbert is an expert in mutations and stuff like that."

Zhane groaned. "Doesn't he know someone that's not related to him?"

"Actually no, he doesn't have many friends. Exactly what is it you have against him?" Sidra asked.

"Nothing, I just enjoy bugging you."

"Brothers." Sidra sighed. "I guess you're making up for lost time. Anyway, we have to go see him."

Andros looked over at Ecliptor. "Do you want to?"

He nodded. "Of course."

"Then we have no time to waste," Sidra said. "Let's go."

* * * * *

Unlike Professor Barlow, Dr. Herbert's home wasn't hidden to protect

him from danger. But it wasn't the easiest place to get to, as it was in the middle of a jungle. However, Professor Barlow had told Sidra of a path to follow and they managed to get there in no time. His house was a small shack, overgrown with vines and exotic flowers. They knocked on the door. He opened it. "May I help you?"

The rangers pushed Karone forward, who had been chosen to tell him of their somewhat odd request.

"Dr. Herbert?" she asked timidly. He nodded. "We're the Power Rangers," she began. "And we need your help."

He looked them over curiously, his thin mustache twitching. Satisfied that they were the real thing, he ushered them in. Inside, they found much odder things than what they wanted from him. Crowded in the shack were two-headed monkeys, one-eyed frogs and a bunch of other strange creatures like a half-gerbil, half-parakeet.

Needless to say, they weren't so afraid to ask him, although the Earth-born rangers were worried he'd be human but have a tail or something.

Instead of being panic-stricken like Barlow, he was intrigued. "How wonderful!" he exclaimed.

"It is?" Ashley raised her eyebrow.

"So Barlow isn't the only nut in his family," Zhane said. Sidra hushed him.

"Well, not for him, of course. But I've always wanted to work on a human or a monster. I just haven't had the opportunity."

"So you can do it then?" Andros asked.

"Well, it's a test of my skills, but I'm willing to try. Of course, I'll have to see the patient."

"Of course," Karone said. "Shall you be coming back with us?"

"No, I'd prefer it if he would come here where I have all of my equipment."

"I'll go get him," Zhane volunteered. He left and returned with Ecliptor a moment later.

"Please give us some privacy," said Dr. Herbert. They went outside. "So, Ecliptor. Do remember what the machine looked like? And how it worked?" He nodded. "Good, tell me every detail."

Ecliptor described it thoroughly. Every so often, Dr. Herbert would take a bottle of a chemical and put it into a bigger glass. When he was done, he stirred it all together and heated it up. Then he took it and gave it to Ecliptor.

"Drinking this tonight should reverse your transformation."

"Thank you." He bowed. Then he raced outside to inform the rangers.

Karone hugged him. "That's wonderful!"

"Come on, let's go home and try it out," said Cassie. They agreed and returned to the Megaship.

Ecliptor gulped it down and fell asleep instantly. Karone put him in a chair and they tiptoed out of the room.

* * * * *

Ecliptor awoke the next morning, unsure of where he was. He sat up and looked around. He was on the Astro-Megaship. That's right, he remembered. I know why I'm here. But why do I feel so strange? He stood up. D.E.C.A gave a computerish scream.

"What? What's the matter?" He asked.

"Oh, never mind. I didn't recognize you for a second. Look."

He appeared on the viewing screen. Now it was his turn to scream, but of joy.

The rangers rushed inside. Karone gasped. "Ecliptor?" she asked.

He nodded. It was true. He was human again. He had black hair and green eyes. He was wearing a black uniform with a touch of green. He looked like a normal, middle-aged man, instead of a scary monster.

"Wow, you look great!" Ashley said. The others complemented him, too.

"Why don't we go to Earth to celebrate?" Andros suggested.

Ecliptor shook his head. "No. There's something I wish to do first."

* * * * *

"Is this it?" TJ asked. "I hope so." They had just climbed a steep hillside to the house on the top.

"Yes, it is. It's exactly as I remember it." Ecliptor walked to the door and held out his fist to knock. He paused.

"Well, go ahead," Karone urged him.

"What if they don't know me? It's been so long. My daughter probably won't even remember me. I haven't seen her since she was a child. Now she's grown up."

"You'll never know," Zhane said, "unless you knock."

"You're right." He rapped on the door. A woman opened it a crack. She had caramel-colored eyes and golden blond hair. Ecliptor recognized her instantly. "Aurelia?"

"Yes, I..." She nearly fainted. "Ecliptor? You're alive!" She ran out and threw her arms around him. "What happened to you?"

"It's a very long story," he replied. "May I come in?"

"Of course, it's still your house. Come in, everyone." She sat them around a table. "I was so worried. I thought I'd never see you again." She started to cry.

"It's all right." He hugged her. "I'm here."

She wiped away her tears. "Who are they?"

"They're the Power Rangers."

"Power Rangers?"

"Yes, the Power Rangers." He repeated the story he had told Zhane, finishing with recent events.

"Oh my goodness. I'm so sorry, my husband. Please forgive me."

"There's no need for you to apologize. Can you forgive me?"

"Of course I can. You don't know how much I've missed you."

"Now where's Emma?"

Aurelia started to cry again. "She's gone," she sobbed. "She was kidnapped."

"Kidnapped?" Ecliptor said alarmed. "By who?"

"One of Dark Spectre's monsters, I believe. Just a couple weeks ago."

"What did it look like?" asked Carlos.

"It was tall and a yellowish color with a touch of brown and perhaps some red. Its head was almost bare and it was carrying a short sword which he made grow."

"That sounds like Darkonda's!" said Karone.

Ecliptor growled. "He'll pay for this."

"But why would he want Ecliptor's daughter?" asked Sidra.

"Because he probably was worried that Ecliptor'd ruin his plans," Andros said. "If he had his daughter, he could make him do whatever he wanted."

"Do you know where he could've taken her?" asked Ashley.

She pointed out the window. "There's a cave in those mountains."

The Rangers stood up. "We'll find her," Carlos promised.

"I'm going to," said Ecliptor.

"But you can't," Karone protested. "Darkonda would try to hurt you."

"Please don't leave again," said Aurelia.

"I must," Ecliptor said. "I can distract him while the rangers get Emma."

"All right. But be careful."

"I will return." They filed out the door.

"Ever since I got here, we've been off rescuing somebody," Sidra commented.

"Well, we're going to rescue someone else," Andros said. They headed off to the mountains.

To be continued...

6. Part Six

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Part Six

"Ow, watch your elbow!"

"Shh! You want him to hear you?"

"Move over!"

"I can't!"

The seven Rangers were cramped in a tiny crevice outside Darkonda's lair. It would be difficult enough for two people to fit, but seven was nearly impossible.

Karone fidgeted, wishing there were fewer Rangers. It would be much less conspicuous that way. She felt a foot nudge her ankle. She looked up. It was Zhane. He jerked his head towards Ecliptor, meaning, "Pay attention." Karone nodded and tried to focus. As the closest people to the opening, she and Zhane would be leading the others inside. But it was hard to watch Ecliptor in danger. She certainly didn't want the job, but unfortunately she'd ended up with the position. She sighed. Andros, who was next to her, squeezed her hand reassuringly.

Ecliptor glanced their way. They all nodded for him to go ahead. He cleared his throat. "Darkonda!"

* * * * *

Darkonda paced the floor of his lair. "Oh, missy, I have great plans in store for you." He laughed. "Actually, I have great plans in store for me."

A teenage girl in a green dress, which was almost black with dust and

dirt, with light brown hair and brown eyes, looked up at him fearfully. She was chained to a long pole that stuck in the ground. "My name is not missy, it's Emma. What do you want from me?" she cried. He laughed again. She trembled. Whatever it was he wanted with her, it was apparent that it was not good.

"Well, Emma, what I want from you is revenge. And from my revenge will come a new power over the dark forces, and then the universe. Not that you'll live to see my reign, mind you. But when your father comes to rescue you, that is, as soon as I find that coward, you'll have the pleasure of watching me destroy him. I can't wait!"

"My father's alive?" Emma gasped. Her mother had told her many stories, about how he was a brave man, who fought against evil, and most likely died doing so. She never believed there could be a chance that he was alive and just never returned. Her face flushed with anger.

"Oh, don't worry about it. I'm sure Daddy still loves you, even if he did replace you."

"What did he ever do to you?" she asked. No, she would not believe this awful creature for a second. Her father would not leave them. _There has to be a logical explanation,_ she thought to herself, _and I bet he knows it._

"Ours is a long and dreadful rivalry. Surely you do not want me to bore you with the details." He paused. "But since you asked so nicelyâ€¦" He snickered. She glared at him fiercely, less afraid than she had been. _I'm getting sick of him_, she realized. For the past week he'd been tormenting her, torturing her. He barely gave her any food, just enough to keep her alive. And everyday she'd had to endure his awful comments and cruel jokes, which made him laugh like a hyena. _I wish it were like the first week, when I was unconscious._

--

"Well, your dear father and I were enemies since we first met on the battlefield. Ecliptor and his honor, it made me sick." He spat on the floor. Emma made a face at the puddle of green slime there. "He was always getting in my way. So one day, when you were just an itsy, bitsy little girl, I decided to turn him into one of my own, a monster. Grant it, he was supposed to be a harmless monster. I'd thought I'd seen the last of him, until I kidnapped a little girl and brought her to Dark Spectre. And, surprise, surprise, the man that was to care for her was good old Ecliptor, still alive, strong as ever and on the dark side. I'd thought peasants with torches had killed him already, you see, and I never expected him to join with us. Probably because he had no where else to go. The little girl became Astronema, princess of evil, and your replacement in your father's heart. But the little witch got too big for her britches. So, in order to destroy Dark Spectre and take over, I had to destroy her too. But Daddy dearest wasn't about to let that happen, no, no. Of course, slight occurrences have happened since then to make things easier for me. But I still won't rest until I defeat your father, once and for all. Any questions?"

"One, when was the last time you took a bath?" She wrinkled her nose. He pushed her, knocking her head against the pole.

"I suggest you be nicer to me. You'll live longer if you do." Emma glowered at him.

They heard a call from outside. "Darkonda!"
> "Well, looks like he's found me. I can't wait for your tearful reunion. It'll be the first and last time you see him."<p>

"Darkonda!!!"

Emma strained to see outside the dark cave. That voice sounded so familiar. _Could it possibly be?_

--

* * * Flashback * * *

Five-year old Emma glanced out the window. She ignored the smells of her mother's cooking that wafted from the kitchen. She spotted someone coming up the hill towards them.

"Father's home!" She exclaimed. She flung open the door and ran into his arms.

"Hey, pumpkin!" He squeezed her tightly. She grinned at him and buried her head in his shoulder.

* * *End Flashback* * *

"Father!" she screamed.

"Be right back!" Darkonda disappeared.

"No! Father!"

* * * * *

Darkonda appeared just outside the entrance to the cave.

"So, he's arrived at last," Zhane said under his breath. Sidra hushed him.

"I see you've undid my little experiment. That's a surprise."

"Release my daughter!" Ecliptor commanded.

Darkonda laughed. "Fight me for her."

Ecliptor lunged at him, slashing his newly repaired sword at his chest.

"We just have to wait until his back is turned," Karone whispered to the others.

"No, our morphers have a stealth mode. We can use it to get past them."

The Earth Rangers looked over at Andros. He shrugged. He didn't know

about this feature either.

"Why didn't you tell us before?" Zhane hissed. "We could've avoided this."

She shrugged. "You never asked."

Karone frowned under her helmet. "Well, never mind that. Let's go. Stealth mode.'

"Stealth mode," they whispered. Their uniforms slowly disappeared into nothingness and themselves along with it.

"Cool!" Ashley said. But whether or not they could hear her, she couldn't tell.

They filed out and looped around them. Then they slipped into the cave.

* * * * *

Emma pulled on her chains, but it was useless. They were made of some metallic alloy found in space that even the Incredible Hulk probably couldn't break. At least, that was the way it seemed to her. Emma didn't care so much about what happened to her anymore, what mattered was that her father was a live and less than a hundred feet away. And he was in danger.

"Help!" she cried out desperately. She saw a bunch of shadows out of the corner of her eye. They looked like people. "Is somebody there?"

Like magic, seven people appeared before her. But not just any ordinary people. "Power Rangers!" she exclaimed.

"Power Down!" shouted the Purple Ranger. The Power Rangers disappeared and seven teenagers were in their place.

"Are you all right?" Karone asked.

Emma nodded. "I'm fine. But, I don't understand. Darkonda said my fatherâ€|"

> Andros scowled. "Don't listen to what he says about anything."<p>

Karone patted her shoulder. "Your father will be fine. And he's our friend. He never was really evil; I know that for a fact. Ecliptor, your father, he's been there for me a lot." Karone's eyes were full of concern for him, and Emma had a slight feeling that'd she'd met the replacement Darkonda had been talking about.

Meanwhile, Carlos was examining her chains. "I've never seen metal like this before." He glanced at Andros. "Can you break it?"
> Andros nodded and placed his battlizer on his wrist. He pressed 1 and broke them with one quick karate chop. <p>

Carlos took off her shackles and helped her up.

"Thanks," she said softly.

"No problem," he said, blushing slightly. Apparently he'd noticed that, a bit more than the others did, that she was every bit as pretty as her mother, perhaps more so. Ashley giggled.

"We'd better get out there," Karone said. "Ecliptor probably needs us."

"Right!" The others chorused. They remorphed.

"You can protect Emma," Zhane said mischievously. Carlos nodded solemnly, not noticing his tone.

"Let's go!" TJ said. The others followed him outside. All the Rangers (except for Carlos, who took Emma to hide under a tree nearby) jumped into the battle, using their weapons on Darkonda. Karone grabbed Ecliptor and brought him over to his daughter where he would be safe. They hear a loud explosion behind them. Karone knew that meant they'd destroyed Darkonda. "Hopefully for once and for all," Karone muttered to herself. The other Rangers rushed over and joined them, demorphing as they did so.

They congratulated each other with high fives and loud cheers.

"Quiet!" Karone said. She pointed to Ecliptor and Emma.

Emma's lip quivered. "Father!" She wrapped her arms around him in a tight hug.

"Oh, pumpkin," Ecliptor said. There were tears in his eyes.

Karone rubbed her eye to stop her own tears. She was happy for them, extremely happy. But she couldn't help feeling that she'd lost something important. Ecliptor really had done a lot for her, but it wasn't the same. Emma was his real daughter, not her.

Andros came up behind her and squeezed her shoulders. "Don't worry, Karone. If Mom and Dad are alive, we'll find them," he said. "I promise you that."

To be continuedâ€¦

7. Part Seven

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Fallen Stars-Part Seven

Karone leaned back in her comfortable chair. She could hear the excited chatter of her friends as they led Ecliptor and his family on a tour of the Megaship. She had denied the role of tour guide, leaving it to the others. Already she felt like an intruder in his family and they hadn't yet been there a day. There was no guarantee that Darkonda was destroyed, and if he wasn't, then there would be a good chance he'd go after them. Therefore, all the rangers had agreed that it would be safest if they remained under their protection. Karone agreed right away, but still, it made her feel strange seeing them together, like a family should be. Though she loved her friends

and brother and knew they'd be there if she needed them, she wanted to be alone for a while. That was how she'd always solved her problems before: alone. So far, though, it wasn't helping this time.

"Hey, what's up?" Zhane strolled onto the bridge leisurely, smiling broadly at her.

"Hi," she mumbled. She forced herself to smile. He wasn't fooled.

Zhane grabbed a chair and sat on it backwards. He rested his head on it, facing her. "Whatcha doin'?" he asked sweetly.

Karone suppressed a giggle. Somehow, just his mere presence was cheering her up already.

"Nothing," she replied. "You?"

> "Nuttin. I'm bored," he whined, looking up at her with puppy dog eyes.<p>

"So what do you want me to do about it?" she asked. She ruffled his hair. He was too cute.

"Hey, don't mess with the hair. It takes work to look this good."

"Yeah, a lot of work," she teased. "What do you want to do?"

"I don't know, what do you wanna do?" he asked playfully. He rolled closer and pushed her hair out of her face. Karone could feel his breath on her neck. His closeness made her nervous, but it was interesting too, very interesting indeed.

Karone was about to answer when the door opened.

"We're home!" Her brother called out. He and Ashley came in, carrying two big paper bags with the word "Walbaum's" on them. Instantly they jumped apart.

Andros regarded them warily. "And what exactly have you two been doing?" he asked.

"N-nothing," Zhane gulped. "We were just talking, I swear. Honest."

> Ashley giggled. "Guilty, guilty, guilty."
 Karone blushed. "What's in the bag?" she asked, changing the subject.

"Come to the work bay and see," Andros replied. He shot Zhane a look.

"I swear, I didn't do anything!" Zhane pleaded, following his best friend down the hall. Karone and Ashley trailed behind single file, keeping Karone as far away from her over-protective brother's wrath as possible.

"Then drop it already. It's your guilty conscience that's telling me otherwise," Andros pointed out.

Zhane contemplated this for a moment. "Oh, okay." He clamped his

mouth shut and remained quiet the rest of the walk.

All of the other rangers and their guests were sitting around the dinner table when they arrived. The Earth Rangers jumped up to greet them.

"Patience!" Ashley held the bag high out of their reach. Andros copied her. "I don't want you guys to spoil your dinner." They all stared at her. "Just kidding," she grinned.

"Ash, you feeling okay? I thought you'd never even joke about that," Cassie said. She felt her best friend's forehead with one hand, and made a grab for the bag with the other. With the agility of the former cheerleader that she was, Ashley quickly jumped out of the way.

"Uh, uh, uh, not until you all sit and behave yourself." They scurried around, like children playing musical chairs. Carlos nearly sat on Emma, who was blushing furiously. Aurelia put her husband's sword in her lap. He glared at her.

Ashley set the bag down on the table, holding it closed.

"I figured," she began, "that the best way to welcome you guys to the ship,
> she nodded to Ecliptor and his family and the two newest rangers, "is with a party. But not just any party," She pulled out a cardboard container from the bag, "an ice cream party."<p>

The Rangers all cheered, except for Karone and Sidra, who looked confused. Alpha, who had come to see what all the commotion was about, would have rolled his eyes if he had any. Instead, the little lights went around his head. "Ay-yai-yai-yai-yai!" he complained. "For people your age. How old are you again? Five?"

TJ clasped his metal shoulder. "Come on, Alpha, no one's too old for ice cream. And you're just jealous cause you can't eat like the rest of us."

"I am no such thing!" he protested.

"Liar, liar, circuitry on fire," DECA taunted. Andros, who did have them, rolled his eyes.

"You're no better DECA," he pointed out. "Who was the one, if I recall correctly, that had her camera stuck in the Synthatron?"

"I most certainly did not! I was framed, I tell you, framed!"

Ashley groaned. "Honestly, who are the children here? You'll have to forgive them," she commented to Sidra, who was standing next to her. "They're all babies, the lot of them."

"Speak for yourself," said TJ.

"Pot calling the kettle black," added Carlos.

"I beg your pardon?" she said haughtily, trying to keep her dignity.

"Er, Ash," Andros said timidly, "They're kinda right."

"What?" She glared at her boyfriend. "I'm not a baby!"

> He raised an eyebrow. "Who was it that practically threw a temper tantrum a week ago, because some people threw out the cookies she made?" The other rangers groaned, wincing at the memory. <p>

"For your information, I did NOT throw a temper tantrum. Stop shaking your heads!" They froze and put on their most innocent looking faces. "And besides," she turned back to her boyfriend and said sweetly, "I made them for you. And not these pigs!"

"We're not pigs!" Zhane jumped in. "And FYI, that is for your information, if you didn't know, your beloved boyfriend- OW!"

> His best friend kicked him in the shin. Karone stifled a giggle. "She doesn't know that I gave them to you because I can't stand her cooking," he whispered. <p>

"Well don't blame me because you're afraid to stand up to your own girlfriend," he hissed loudly.

"Ahem!" Ashley cleared her throat, unable to contain her annoyance. The room fell silent. The two Kerovians turned away from each other with a "humph".

Aurelia glanced at her husband. _Aren't they supposed to be the good guys? Is it this chaotic on the other side of the fence?_

Nope. Unknown to the rangers, their people could speak to mind to their spouses and children, due to a special bonding ceremony that was their version of a wedding, and similar DNA patterns.

I for one find this amusing, Emma chimed in_. It's good to know that even Power Rangers can act like normal teenagers. Too good is just- scary._ She shuddered. Ecliptor had to admit that she did have a good point. Humans were humans after all, superhero or no. And they were still practically kids, from his point of view. But back to the current problem.

"Anyway," Ashley continued cheerfully. It still amazed Andros that she could back so quickly. But it was a blessing in this situation. _You know, sometimes I'm glad that she has a short memory span._ He gazed at his girlfriend affectionately. Unable to control herself this time, Karone allowed a small giggle to escape. Fortunately, Ashley didn't hear.

"We have lots of toppings for you." She emptied the contents of the bag creating a rather large pile of Ashley's favorite thing: junk food. The Earth-born rangers stared at in wonderment, like little kids in a candy store. One of the perks of living in space without adult supervision was "No snacking between meals" didn't apply here. The only reason they couldn't live like this everyday was that the Synthatron wasn't exactly the best cook, particularly when it came to Earth foods. As for Ashley's attempts, well, more often than not it ended up as refuse, probably abandoned on some planet for the unfortunate alien inhabitants to deal with.

"Let's see." She rummaged through the piles. "We've got maraschino cherries," TJ made a grab for the jar, "butterscotch," Carlos snatched that one, "chocolate syrup," she saved that for herself,

"caramel sauce," Cassie's, "sprinkles, both chocolate and rainbow," Andros levitated the little bottles towards himself, "marshmallow flush," "Interesting," Karone remarked, "whipped cream," Zhane opened it and sprayed some in his mouth, making all except TJ, his teacher, shudder, "and much more." She turned to the newcomers. "I'm sure you'll find something you like."

"Okay, if you say so," said Emma bravely. She dipped her finger into the butterscotch jar that Carlos had so unselfishly offered her. "Hmm, tasty."

"Man, I could live on this stuff," Zhane said, his mouth full of cream, both inside and out.

"You're foaming at the mouth!" Sidra said horrified. She gave him a napkin. "Gross." She examined a carton of ice cream. "Who are Ben and Jerry? And do your people really eat them?"
> "That's no weirder than eating this guy," Karone told her. "Who ever heard of somebody named Haggan Daz? Oh well." She grabbed a spoon and dug it into the ice cream. It was hard as a rock. <p>

Ashley giggled. "Those are brand names," she explained. "Let it defrost a bit." She swallowed a spoonful of Rocky Road, dripping with chocolate. "They're the ones who made them. Ice cream is just milk and sugar and a lot of additives that I'd rather not know about, but they're all on the label if you're interested. I find that it spoils my appetite." She licked her spoon clean, making sure not a drop of chocolate was left. Andros wiped some syrup off her chin.

"Honestly, you're a messier eater than Zh-" He was interrupted by DECA, who'd been quiet and sullen all the time, suddenly crackling to life.

"Incoming transmission. Report to the bridge immediately. I repeat. Incoming transmission. Report to the bridge immediately."

The team and co. exchanged glances and raced to their respective seats on the bridge. Andros took his normal position, assuming leadership as always. The others looked on worriedly.

"Mayday!" A voice cracked. The screen was filled with static. "We are under attack by Dark Spectre's soldiers. Mayday!" The transmission came to an abrupt end.

Andros's jaw dropped. He stood there, staring at the blank screen. His shoulders were trembling. Ashley quickly ran over to him and clutched him to her. "Andros, what's wrong?"

The others stared at them in surprise. Andros never seemed like this before, not even when he found his sister. There was a mixture of joy and terror in his eyes. Only Zhane had an inkling of what was wrong. Trying to find his voice, he began "Andros, wasn't thatâ€|?"
> Andros turned around to face his comrades. "That'sâ€| that was my dadâ€|" <p>

To be continuedâ€|

End

file.